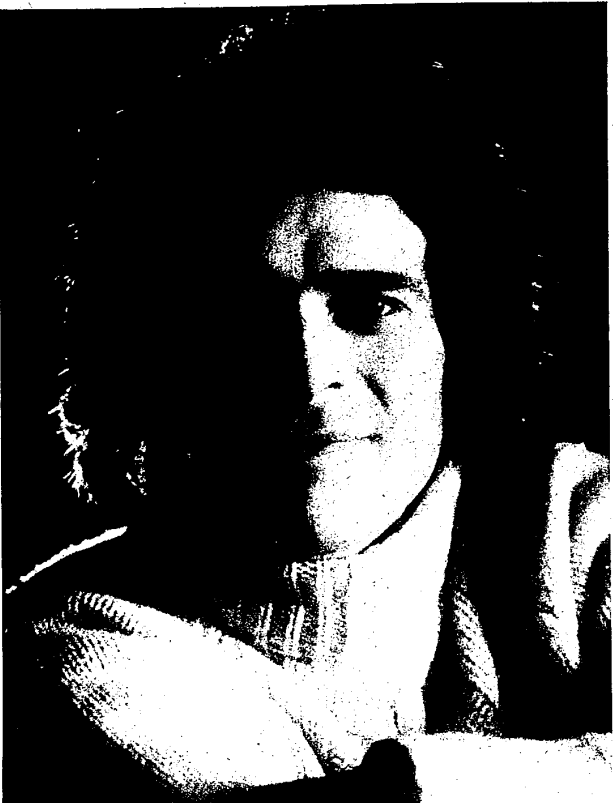


Oakway's top cellist teacher to a 'great'



Oakway Symphony is still a fledgling orchestra, but among its first chair leaders is the man who taught one of the greatest cellists in the world.

Jacob Becker, Oakway's principal cellist, once taught Gregor Piatigorsky in their native Russia. Becker, then 16, guided Piatigorsky for two years before the Piatigorskys moved to Moscow and Becker went away to college in St. Petersburg.

"He would come for his lessons with fingers half-frozen," Becker recalled of his then pupil. "I would take his hands between mine and massage them until warm again. Then we would begin our lesson."

They lost contact for years when Becker came to the United States. But one day Piatigorsky, now world famous, gave a recital in the Detroit area and, according to his first teacher, "played like God!"

Backstage later, Becker went unrecognized by his former pupil until he shook hands and said, "Do you remember when you would come to your lessons and I would massage your fingers until they were warm?" The maestro remembered. The two friends were reunited in a touching embrace.

Becker attended the Imperial School of Ekaterinslav and St. Petersburg. While at St. Petersburg he taught cello and played in the string quartet.

Although his primary responsibility at St. Petersburg was teaching cello and several music courses, he also pursued a study in engineering.

This was a time of unrest and revolution in Russia. Before immigrating to America, Becker and his family suffered separation and tragedy in the four different wars that swept across the land.

With only the things on his person, Becker escaped Russia by walking to the newly independent state of Estonia. From there he was able to communicate briefly with his family.

Due to persecution, he left his family and boarded a boat for America. The boat took him to London and on to New York City, but he was unable to dock in New York and was transported to Boston.

Because of his engineering background, Becker felt he might find employment and continue his studies in this field. He traveled from Boston to Detroit, but was unsatisfied with the work he found and turned again to music.

His musical career in the Detroit area began with a Russian touring group, but not wanting to be on the road all the time he found other employment. He played with various groups and orchestras, including many years with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

Today, in the metropolitan Detroit area, Becker's musical talents and contributions are well known. He is currently a resident of Southfield.

The cello is a bulky, awkward instrument. While touring with various groups, Becker insisted on practicing finger exercises and difficult orchestral passages daily. This presented problems, especially when his cello was in the rear of the instrument truck.

So he invented a folding fingerboard with strings. Although this produced little sound, it enabled him to exercise his wrist and fingers. This invention was appropriately called the "cellisimo," or little cello.

Becker has bright, blue eyes that come alive when he talks about music and people.

He has former students, all over the United States who are now playing in various symphony orchestras. As a teacher he wants his students to learn correct technique from the beginning.

"The technique must be developed from the beginning and they must be developed intelligently. The beginning of study is most important if the end result is seen in proper perspective."

He feels that the "elevation of the hand in producing the pitch on the cello is very important. The wrist and fingers must be manipulated in a certain way — else the cello would be little more than a guitar."

Composer commissions

A joint project for the commissioning and performing of new works by distinguished American composers will be undertaken by the nation's most prestigious symphony orchestras next year.

An important part of the Bicentennial celebration, a major portion of the project was developed and will be administered by Marshall W. Turkin, Executive Director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO).

A \$206,000 grant by the National Endowment for the Arts and its Bicentennial Commission will fund the project.

The monies are to be shared between the Detroit, Cincinnati, National, Pittsburgh, St. Louis and San Francisco.

Joey appearing at Ted's

The faces of Joey Van include singer, comic, impressionist and actor and the patrons of Ted's Restaurant, Woodward and Square Lake roads, Bloomfield Hills, may see him nightly Tuesday through May 4. He will appear from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. weekdays and on Fridays and Saturdays from 8:30 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. His credits range

from appearing in the lead role of the world premiere of "Puntilla" in California, to a standing ovation on the Joey Bishop Show as half of the comedy team of "Van and Palmer." Joey impersonates as many as 50 characters.

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Dutch choir to perform at Lahser

The Matrozen Koor, a Dutch sailor boys' choir from The Hague, Holland, will appear in concert at Lahser High School at 8 p.m. Tuesday under the auspices of the Dutch Immigrant Society and the Hollandia Society.

Established in 1928, the choir is composed of 45 boys, seven to 16 years in age, and is under the direction of Sipke de Jong. The choir performs frequently on radio and television programs in The Netherlands and has given concerts in Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Poland and France. Among their guest conductors have been such famous men as Antal Dorati, Felix de Nobel and Bruno Maderna.

The choir will present selections from Menegali, Kodaly, Bartok and Dutch composers.



At the Raven

The Raven Gallery of Southfield will present singer-composer-guitarist Bill Oliver Swofford and comedienne Beverley Nicks through April 21. Swofford is a 23 year old North Carolinian who began his blues-folk singing days during the Dylan era. Ms. Nicks, a former Detroit television personality has changed to the lighter side of the news. Her themes are contemporary situations. Both will appear Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Sundays at 9:30 and 10:30 p.m. and Fridays and Saturdays at 9:30 and 11:30 p.m.

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